

Christian Education in the Mixed Economy of The Mission-Shaped Church

By The Reverend John Littleton

“A missionary church preaches the Gospel and makes disciples”. This statement is one of the five values of mission statements which provide a framework for the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia.¹ Jesus commissioned his disciples to go, make disciples, baptise and teach.² Teaching the Christian Way, helping people to learn the Christian faith is one of the key tasks of any Christian community. Christian learning is to be at the centre of congregational life. Such “Christian Education has to do with the formation and growth of individuals and congregations in their faith, life and ministry, in response to God’s sacred presence through Jesus Christ.”³

A learning community approach to Christian Education focuses on an educational ministry for the whole congregation.⁴ This article considers Christian Education in the mixed economy of the mission-shaped Church in the light of a learning community perspective.

GROWING NEW CHRISTIANS

At the Anglican Clergy Conference for The Diocese of Adelaide 2005 Archbishop Jeffrey Driver introduced the idea of “The Roadmap” as a language of discourse for the Diocese. “The Roadmap” had four directions, GROW, SERVE, TEACH and GIVE. Each of these topics included a series of questions to promote discussion in parishes. “The Roadmap” topic “Teach” has these six questions:

- “Do we have a structure of small groups for learning?”
- Is there an ongoing group where new Christians can learn about and grow in the faith?
- Do we have a considered process of equipping our people for ministry? Can we work with neighbouring parishes/churches in this process?
- How do we invest in the development and renewal of our leaders, clergy and lay, so that they keep having something to give us?
- Are we consciously equipping our people for the task we believe God has for us, or simply providing education programs in an ad hoc way?
- Can the wider diocese or bishop help us in this area?”

These pertinent and wide-ranging questions will certainly lead to a lively discussion in parishes and if followed up to renewed action in learning for ministry. “The Roadmap” topic “Grow” includes these questions: “Are you using program tools such as Alpha, Cursillo, Credo, etc.? Do they just serve the “in group’?”⁵

In his addresses during 2006 Archbishop Driver emphasised that in a missionary church catechesis would be taken seriously. In an address in February 2006 he said,

“More and more we will be reaching people who have no background in the Christian faith, no heritage in the Catholic and Reformed tradition in which we Anglicans stand. Every parish, at least in cooperation with others around it, should have a basic catechetical group, where new Christians can explore the basic elements of the faith. And then, without being slavishly bound, we need to help people access the riches of our own history as Anglicans, drawing on the many things that are strong, balanced and beneficial. Give me a Church that takes catechesis seriously!”⁶

The Archbishop has a special concern in parishes for an ongoing programme for teaching the basics of the faith to new believers.⁷

This emphasis on nurturing new Christians in the Christian faith and life was also present in the Diocesan Council's Statement of Strategic Directions for 2006-2010 given to the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide during October 2006. There was a desire expressed to assist congregational education and nurture of "seekers, disciples and apostles".⁸ The broad strategy of nurturing a "coherent and passionate Christianity in people of every age as they move from being seekers to being apostles"⁹ is to be commended.

MIXED ECONOMY OF THE MISSION-SHAPED CHURCH

The Mission-Shaped Church will be a "mixed economy" Church. "The mixed economy is essentially a church comprised of any number of forms or expressions."¹⁰

In a mission-shaped church members are encouraged to reach beyond themselves in mission to create fresh expressions of Church life. A fresh expression is a form of Church established primarily for the benefit of people in our changing culture who are not yet members of any church, for example Café Churches, newly planted congregations, Workplace Churches.¹¹

In a mixed economy Church traditional ways of being Church exist side by side with these newer forms or fresh expressions of Church life which help to grow new Christians. Learning the Christian faith will happen in a variety of ways in different contexts of Church life. As the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said "If Christ is the embodiment of God, and the Church is Christ's body on earth, then no single expression of Church can ever exhaust Christ."¹² Being formed in Christ can happen in a variety of Church contexts. Indeed

Christian formation and education happens already in the variety of different parishes in the Anglican Church, as it does in the variety of parishes/congregations in all Christian churches.

In Australian produced resources for mission planning, Churches of all kinds are invited to describe their Key Ministry Areas (KMAs).¹³ A KMA is a “grouping together of like and/or related activities for which desired end results can be set (and evaluated) in order to advance the Mission and realise the Vision”. Examples of KMAs include Children’s Ministry, Small Groups Ministry, Sunday Services and Senior’s Ministry. These are key ministry objectives for which there will be key learning goals. A co-ordinator will be assigned to take responsibility for each KMA or Key Ministry Objective. KMAs are to provide a Christ-centred ministry to children and Seniors and so on.¹⁴ Prayer and faith goals are established and programmes implemented with appropriate resources for that particular Church context.

In the literature about the mixed economy of the mission-shaped Church there is an imperative to grow new Christians in all expressions of Church, especially through fresh expressions of Church life. Whether they be traditional/inherited or fresh/innovative/emerging expressions of Church they can be mission-shaped. The Learning Community approach to Christian Education provides a very useful framework within which to explore educational ministry in a variety of ways and contexts, including the formation and growth of new believers who participate in fresh expressions of Church life. There will indeed be “many windows of access to Christian Education”¹⁵ through the variety of Christian communities in the emerging future church.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY FOCUS

The learning community approach helps each congregation identify educational ministry for the whole congregation. Christian Education seen in the context of the congregation as a learning community has four key aspects as indicated in figure 1.

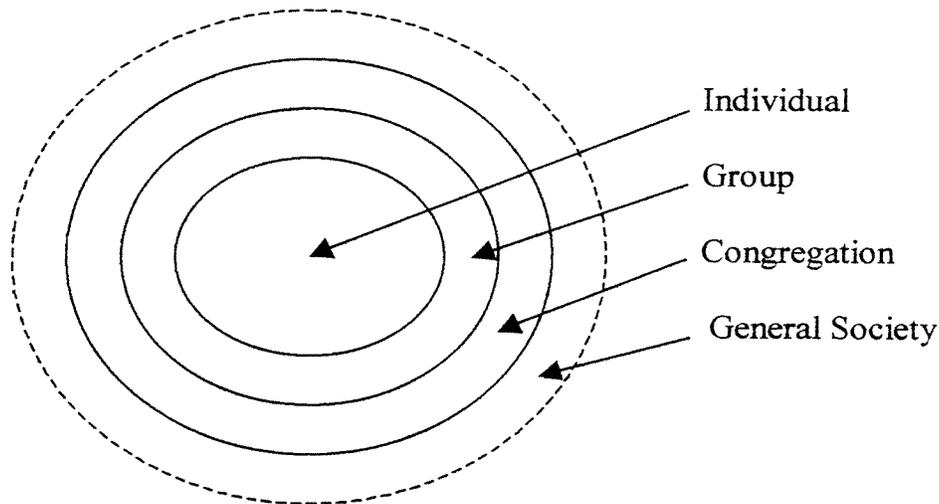


Figure 1. Four Aspects of Christian Education

In the learning community four people-centred aspects appear for consideration: the individual, the group, the congregation as a whole, and the general society where Christians and those who do not belong to a community of faith, live and work.”¹⁶ These four aspects of Christian Education apply to any Christian Community large or small, traditional or fresh expression.

By looking at the whole congregation the learning community approach provides a broad framework within which the parts can be outlined and reviewed before new directions are suggested. The process of review recognises the existing learning opportunities in a congregation and creates openings for the discussion of new learning needs. It honours current ministry before future directions are suggested. The practical exercise of *Review* outlined in the article “Leadership in the Congregation that Learns”¹⁷ offers a way forward.

The diagram (Figure 1) of simple concentric circles provides an effective way to remember the total parish learning scene and a checklist of review for existing educational ministries. During that process future directions may be recommended. The need to grow new believers and the need to have learning goals for Key Ministry Areas (KMAs) could be considered in ways appropriate to the congregation, if such learning needs are not already being met. The learning community wholistic approach would endorse any initiative to nurture and educate “seekers, disciples and apostles.”¹⁸ If there is a need to do more to nurture seekers in a local church community then resources appropriate to the people, place and culture of that Church can be suggested. Suggestions could include courses like Alpha or Emmaus or Connect or Credo or home-grown materials.¹⁹

A Learning Community approach seeks to identify and design an educational ministry for the whole congregation before resources and programmes are decided. Leaders are able to move beyond resources and courses towards the design of an educational ministry.²⁰ This is a comprehensive approach within which issues of the mixed economy of the mission-shaped Church, the Diocesan imperative to nurture new believers and the Archbishop’s Roadmap questions can be constructively handled in various and relevant ways in the light of the local context and knowledge. This combining of the local and Diocesan contexts enriches both perspectives and makes both more accountable. This cross fertilisation of ideas can only result in a more enthusiastic promotion of the cause of Christ through Christ centered ministry learning goals.

AMBER LIGHTS

There are however some amber light issues to discuss as we consider the learning community concern for the Christian learning of all members of the congregation and the mixed economy church emphasis on the making of new disciples.

The practical exercise of review mentioned above does require some prioritised time commitment. Such a commitment may not be thought necessary by some who already have concrete suggestions. *A period of discernment* to consider local learning goals may be bi-passed. Discerning the Christian Education which is appropriate in the mixed economy of the mission-shaped Church will take time and energy.

The issue of the “mission-shaped Church” becoming more like a “Church-shaped mission” is raised by John Hull in his small book called “Mission-Shaped Church A Theological Response”.²² Hull encourages us to keep in balance the views that God is at work in the world outside the Church as well as within the Church which needs to grow new Christians. Hull suggests that a *theology of mission* would consider the mission of the Church to the nation and the world.²³ He wants a wider view of mission than that which seeks only different kinds of local church. He wants a church which tackles issues of poverty and the marginalisation of disabled people, a church which hears and acts on the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6: 17-26), a church of the Magnificat (Luke 1:51f).²⁴ Here is a reminder to look at the whole as well as the parts. Hull wants any church renewal policy to be based on a sound theology of mission. This is wise advice. Any educational enterprise in the Christian Church needs a sound theological base.

John Hull is critical of the English Report “Mission-Shaped Church”²⁵ because he argues that it is confused in its theology of mission and that it sometimes suggests that the mission is the church. As Hull states “the mission is not the church”. Hull devotes a chapter in his book to the topic of “The Church, The

Mission and The Kingdom”. The mission is to bring in the kingdom of God and the church is the agent of that mission. The Church is the agent of mission and is to assist in the growth of the Kingdom as well as exhibiting signs of the kingdom.²⁶

The Australian publication “Building the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia” avoids this criticism by stating “that the Church in all its forms needs to be an active participant in God’s mission, the ‘*missio dei*’.” Christians “are sent out to live and proclaim the Good News of God’s Kingdom amidst the world’s social, political and economic realities”.²⁷ Christians are “Kingdom people, not Church people”.²⁸ Educational ministry has to have a sound biblical and theological base. Biblical and theological reflection is central to the process of Christian Education.

Then there is the issue of the potential for competing interests between the important emphasis on the formation and nurture of *new believers* and the desirability of *life-long Christian learning*. In his article in *St Mark’s Review* (2006) called “The Mission-Shaped Church and the Formation of Christian Disciples” John Dunnill argues “that the Mission-Shaped Church is deficient in the attention it gives to the importance of maturation processes in the making of Christians”.²⁹ “Christian formation is not only about ‘faith’ but also about ‘faithfulness’ in practice over time” he writes.³⁰ It may be that because the nurture and formation of new believers has been under-emphasised that a new emphasis is needed in some churches, but not to the detriment of an interest in life-long Christian learning.

Bob Jackson in his book “Hope for the Church” provides a different view by indicating that “Evangelism has moved from being a one-off call to repentance at the foot of the cross to a journey alongside those who are making their way into Christian discipleship”.³¹ Jackson encourages ‘process evangelism’ and writes, “Churches that invest time and effort on a long-term basis in the renewal and articulation of the faith of church members, and in the sharing of that faith with

enquirers to help them into discipleship, are more likely to grow than those that do not.”³²

Holding the views of Dunnill and Jackson in tension may lead towards an educational ministry for new believers *and* long term Church members. This both/and learning outcome rather than an either/or outcome is endorsed by a learning community concept of Christian Education. Even at times when a choice for one or the other may be suggested due to lack of resources, holding both in tension may lead to a more creative outcome such as sharing resources with another congregation or within a region.

In this “amber lights” section I have noted three issues of concern. There are concerns about a period of discernment, a theology of mission and an educational ministry for all in the mixed economy of the Mission-Shaped Church. However, I must add that, although I have raised these issues, I give my enthusiastic support to the practical ideas advanced for the renewal of the Church through the literature mentioned in this article on the mixed economy of the Mission-Shaped Church.³³

CONCLUSION

The learning community wholistic approach offers a broad framework within which to introduce and consider the imperatives of the mixed economy of the mission-shaped Church. The learning community approach is comprehensive in that it insists on holding issues in tension in order to enhance Christian learning for all members of a congregation rather than only some. It offers hope to members of a congregation that their learning styles will be catered for in a variety of ways within the Church – as individuals, in groups/family, congregation and general society.

Such an overall approach is entirely consistent with mixed economy perspective of the Mission-Shaped Church, which argues for a greater variety in the expression of Church life in society in order to make the Christian Gospel more accessible. In both ways, through a mixed economy and a learning community approach, Christian formation and education are essential for new and long-standing friends of Jesus.³⁴

John Littleton

March 14th, 2007

jjlittleton@bigpond.com

References:

1. Nichols, A ed. (2006) *Building the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia*, General Synod Office, Sydney, Anglican Church of Australia, p.10.
2. Matthew 28:19-20
3. Roediger W.E.W. and Littleton T.J.H. ed (2006) *Spiritual Presence: Commemorating 150 Years at Glen Osmond*, St. Saviour's Anglican Church, Glen Osmond, Openbook Print, p.109.
4. Ibid p.112
5. Driver J. (2005) *The Roadmap*, Clergy Conference, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia. www.adelaide.anglican.com.au
6. Driver J. (2005) *Choose Life – Live together*. Address to the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion, Adelaide 24/2/06, p.2. A note from the author. A Catechism is a document which outlines the teaching of the Christian Church in a question and answer format. *A Prayer Book for Australia* in the Anglican Church of Australia includes a "Catechism: Questions and Answers on Christian Faith and Conduct". Catechesis is a process of learning within the Christian Community whereby the Christian faith is passed on to others. In his book *Inner Growth Outer Change: An Educational Guide to Church Renewal*, John Westerhoff includes a chapter called "The World of Catechesis". (Dove Communications, Australia, 1979).
7. Driver J. (2006) The President's Address, Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide 26/10/06, Anglican Church Office, 26 King William Road, North Adelaide SA 5006, p.9
8. Diocesan Council's Statement of Strategic Directions for 2006-2010, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide Synod, Anglican Church Office, p.7
9. Ibid p.6
10. Nichols A. ed. (2006) op. cit. p.2
11. Ibid, chapter 7
12. Robinson S. (2006) *Reaching Beyond Ourselves: Mission, 'fresh expressions', planning and planting resource*, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide Lay Leaders and Clergy Conference, September 2006, p.39
13. Robinson, Smith, Wilson (2005) *The Map-Mission Action Planning*, Anglicare/Evangelism Ministries, Anglican Diocese of Sydney, pp. 83-85
14. Robinson S. (2006) op.cit. p. 44
15. Littleton J. (2003) *Many Windows of Access to Christian Education*, article 2, www.stsavioursgo.net
16. Roediger W.E.W. and Littleton T.J.H. ed. (2006) op.cit. p.112

17. Littleton J. (2007) *Leadership in the Congregation that Learns* article 9, available from the author.
18. Diocese – Council Statement of Strategic Directions for 2006-2010, op.cit p.7
19. www.alphacourse.org www.natsoc.org.uk/emmaus www.connect-course.org/connect credo www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/theological ; For further information M. Booker and M. Ireland (2003) *Evangelism – which way now?* An evaluation of Alpha, Emmaus, Cell Church and other contemporary strategies for evangelism, Church House Publishing, London.
20. Roediger W.E.W. and Littleton T.J.H. (2006) op.cit. p.112
21. Littleton J. (2007) *Leadership in the Congregation that Learns*, article 9, p.9
22. Hull J.M. (2006) *Mission-Shaped Church – A Theological Response*, SCM Press
23. ibid. p.35
24. ibid p.36
25. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*, (2004), Church House Publishing, London
26. Hull J.M. (2006) op.cit. pp.1-4
27. Nichols A. ed. (2006) op.cit. p.1
28. ibid. p.8
29. Dunnill J. (2006) *The Mission-Shaped Church and the Formation of Disciples*, St Marks Review 2006(i) No. 200 p.34
30. ibid. p.31
31. Jackson B. (2002) *Hope for the Church, contemporary strategies for growth*, Church House Publishing, London, p.80
32. ibid. p.83
33. Hull J.M. (2006) op.cit. Introduction pp. ix-x. The idea for this sentence derived from a similar comment that John Hull made on his issue of theological reservations about the English Report *Mission-Shaped Church*.
34. John 15:14-15